

The Builder.

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N old friend of ours, when he hears the expression "measure and value," usually exclaims, "Measure and robbery;" and those persons who are acquainted with the subject, and can look at it dispassionately, know that unfortunately, there is ground for the remark. Tradesmen who are working one for another, with the understanding that the work done by each is to be measured and valued, in order to strike the balance, have a coarse but expressive term, which shews their own notion of the system: they call it *blood-work*, and would never think for a moment, under other circumstances, of allowing a builder, to whom they were to pay money, to make out his charge by measure and value. Amongst the community generally, this same feeling extends; and the consequence is, that men will hardly build a pig-stye, or paint two or three doors or windows, without a previous contract on the part of the workman. What should be the most just and proper mode of arriving at an equitable settlement has fallen into disuse, and many builders of the present day have paid severely for undue advantages enjoyed by their predecessors.

It is truly surprising, that so intelligent and powerful a body as the builders are, should allow this state of things to exist. It appears to have been caused by a refinement in the description of details introduced by the early measurers, and the consequent multiplication of items which, when all priced singly, at sums not above the worth of each article or process considered separately, amount in the gross to much more than the real value of the whole work done.

A writer in the first number of "London's Architectural Magazine" (March, 1834), in an article "On the present state of the professions of architect and surveyor," referring to the objections made by employers to admit surveyors to measure works, says:—"Nor can any one be surprised at it, when we witness the extortionate charges made by some surveyors, whom I shall here style *custom surveyors*. This is the manner in which they proceed: two surveyors meet to make out an account of certain works done. We will suppose the account which they have to settle is a plumber's bill. The first article is 18 cwt. of milled lead; the plumber's surveyor requires 25s. per cwt.; the surveyor for the opposite party remonstrates, and points out to him that the prime cost was 15s.; the other replies, that 25s. is the customary price, and that he cannot take less. To convince his opponent, he opens an old measuring-book, and shews that 25s. has been charged in an account that he settled on behalf of Mr. Getall with Mr. Easy, the surveyor, some years before; and he again repeats, that it is the *custom* to charge 25s., and that he cannot deviate from it. In the same way, he charges 1s. per foot for pipe that only costs 4d., and 1s. per foot for solder that only costs 5d.; and so he goes on in the same ratio with all other articles in the bill. After charging so extortionately for all time and materials for making a joint to a pipe, he has the conscience to ask, in addition,

2s. 6d. for that joint, though he cannot tell why he does so, except that it is the *custom*, &c. The consequence of all this is, that the surveyor of the opposite party, if he has any conscience, cannot settle the account, and it is referred to the lawyers." The fault rested more with the system than the men. The result could have been anticipated.

In any alteration of the system that might be attempted, it would not be sufficient to deal with the prices to be allowed; reference must be made to the mode of measuring. The prices set forth in the various books annually published on the subject, have been carefully calculated, and for work done in the best manner, on ordinary credit, as given by respectable houses to their regular customers, are probably no more in most cases, than will return the tradesman a fair profit for the capital and skill employed.

Unluckily, however, surveyors consider themselves bound to claim for their employers (when there is no agreement), the same prices in all cases alike, without reference to the manner in which the work is executed; and conscientious men are often pained, when called in to "measure and value" work, at being obliged to put a sum for it—say 20 per cent.—higher than that for which they know perfectly well the tradesman, their employer, would gladly undertake a precisely similar job.

Look at the difference in work as executed by different parties. Why, a pair of folding-doors we saw this morning cost the maker five and twenty per cent. more than doors of the same size we saw yesterday; and yet if these were to be measured and valued, an asserted custom would force the surveyor to put the same price to the indifferent work as to the very good. In painting and plastering, even a greater difference may constantly be found. The proper preparation of work for painting forms an important item in the calculation of prices; and this in execution, in many, many instances, is not attended to at all. If able and upright surveyors would become *really* valuers; if throwing aside in a degree the trammels of a custom which has nearly destroyed itself, they would price the works submitted to them according to their proper value, considering the special circumstances of each case, the actual cost, and the skill exhibited, they would soon gain the confidence of the public, and induce an equitable mode of dealing and great improvement in our operatives.

We approach this subject not without hesitation: we are satisfied that the present system is as injurious to builders as it is unsatisfactory to the public, and we sincerely desire to aid in effecting some salutary alteration.

KENSINGTON PARISH AND THE BUILDINGS ACT.

On Monday, the 23rd inst., a vestry meeting was held at St. Mary Abbot's, Kensington, to consider what steps should be taken to obtain a repeal or satisfactory revision of the Metropolitan Buildings Act. The churchwarden, Mr. Bellworthy, in the chair.

Mr. HAWKES briefly introduced the matter to the vestry; he condemned the Act as a piece of arbitrary tyranny; it was objectionable not merely as a tax on the parishioners for unnecessary services, but on account of its continued interference with private rights and comforts; and he called urgently on the parish to exert themselves to obtain its total repeal, or at all events, such a modification of it as might render it less objectionable.

Mr. GUNTER addressed the vestry at some length, and gave a humorous account of the difficulties he had found in making a few trifling repairs to farm buildings on his estate, and

of the half-guinea fees consequent thereon. In his own residence, where he was making alterations, he wished to enlarge a room by removing a chimney-breast, but the Act said he shouldn't, and for a long time his views were delayed in consequence, though ultimately he effected what was wished. He thought the Act one of the greatest innovations of modern times, and would do all he could to obtain its repeal. Nor could he sit down without making one personal observation, which was, that he thought the clerk of their district surveyor had no business to enter a building without first knocking at the door: if he persisted in doing so, he ought at least to wear some badge, or he might one day be taken for something less honest and treated as such.

Mr. STEPHEN BIRD said he had been in Kensington more than forty years, and never knew of a single accident through want of sufficient walls or other bad construction. The houses were all built safely, there had never been a failure, and the Act he thought not wanted there. Many of the provisions were most absurd. The clause which called for 2 feet of brickwork round a chimney-pot if above 4 feet high, and a fee of 10s. 6d. to the surveyor, was one of these, and would force people to put up with smoky chimneys. A pot 4 feet high could be fixed quite safely without the brickwork or the surveyor. No builder was safe in commencing: to understand the Act in parts was impossible: it was a tax on the parish, and a great abomination.

Mr. E. NIXON (of Beldon Lodge), was disposed to think the Act altogether objectionable, and that no revision would be so satisfactory as a repeal. Its interference with trifles was most objectionable, and he referred to a "rabbit-butcher" case which had come within his own knowledge. Worse, however, than this, an Englishman's house was no longer his castle. The comfort of a friend's daughter in Kensington, who was seriously ill, had been greatly interfered with by the conduct of the district surveyor's clerk, in respect of a tin tube hastily put up to prevent the chamber chimney from smoking. A petition should be immediately addressed to Parliament.

Mr. RYLAND said, a friend, who had recently raised his chimney four courses of bricks, had been called on for 10s. 6d.

Mr. GOWIN said he thought it desirable to mention, although many there were probably aware of it, that a speedy revision of the Act was contemplated by the proper parties. That Kensington would be exempted from its control was not at all likely; the better course for the parish would be, to point out what they considered objectionable to the Commissioners of Woods and Works, either through the official referees or otherwise, and there was no doubt due attention would be paid to these objections. There was much that was good in the Act, and repeal could not be anticipated. The great point to be obtained was the protection of the public with as little interference with private rights as possible.

Mr. HANSON could not see any one good part in the Act. Mr. BIRD said he was of the same opinion; it militated against ventilation, for you could not open a window without a fee; it increased the rent of a small house a pound per annum, and it interfered greatly to prevent the exercise of ingenuity.

Mr. HAWKES, in closing the discussion, objected to the strictly legal form given to all the proceedings at the referees' office, and the difficulty of obtaining information. The meeting then agreed, that a petition for the total and immediate repeal of the Act, as injurious and unsatisfactory, should be drawn up and presented forthwith. And a committee was appointed to carry out this resolution, and further, to communicate with the Commissioners of Woods and Works.

The vestry then proceeded to discuss the injurious tendency of the window-tax, and resolved to present a petition for its immediate repeal.

* On Wednesday night, in the House of Commons, Mr. Forster asked if it was the intention of Government to bring in any measure this session to amend the Metropolitan Buildings Act, against which there had been so many complaints. Mr. J. Graham said it was the intention of Government to bring in a Bill to amend that part of the Act by which persons who were referees under it, were prevented from following their own profession as surveyors. There would be thousands of referees, two of whom would receive only 400l. a year, because they would be allowed their private practice. He did hope that another Bill with more comprehensive amendments would be brought in in the course of the session.